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THE HEROINES SHOWCASE

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Lola Dowling

THE WARLOCK WOMEN

by Nick Chinn

Some of the best, of not *the* best *literature* ever to come out of comics is writer/artist Jim Starlin's ADAM WARLOCK series. Whereas most comics contain superficial characters who go through the Marvel motions of battling every threat in the universe, Starlin's Warlock is a deep-thinker, representing the troubles of the cosmos. He is more at war with his own self and sense of purpose than he is with the baddies he physically fights. Warlock's purpose in life is not to fight and destroy false gods, but merely to seek the answer to the one big question – "Why?"

In this light, Starlin's Adam Warlock represents the archetypal wanderer and seeker of truth. In this position, the only matter that he can worry about is *himself,* and any other characters who surround him are merely supporting players. Because of this situation, Gamora and Matriarch, the two major women the the long Warlock series, are relegated to the background, serving as pawns in the game within Warlock's mind.

Starlin's Warlock series begins with *Strange Tales* #178 and continues through #181, when Warlock regains his own book, starting with #9. Previous Warlock comics, in *Marvel Premiere,* and *Warlock,* don't count because Starlin has gone off on a different tangent, just as he re-directed Captain Marvel upon taking over that book. But where *Captain Marvel* was more straight action and fantasy, *Warlock* was a tirade on the paradoxes and evils of the System – highly cynical attacks on the state of humanity, touching upon philosophy, theology, psychology and government.

Perhaps it was the high intellectual content that led to the demise of the *Warlock* series at #15. Not until half a year later, with an epic battle in *Avengers Annual* #7 and continued in *Marvel Two-In-One Annual* #2, was the soul-searching Warlock saga put to rest – with Warlock's "death," which he fully expected.

Matriarch and Gamora may have been the most noticeable women in the series, but the first female introduced is a nameless space traveler pursued by Black Knights of Magus, who is Warlock's seemingly evil alter ego. These days we would equate Magus' Black Knights to Darth Vader's Imperial Storm Troopers. The nameless girl is used as a plot tool to inform Warlock of the evil Magus, conqueror of a thousand worlds.

Because she is a function of the overall scheme, she necessarily dies even as Warlock defends her. Why is Warlock so morose over her death? Surely he has failed before. But perhaps the fact she is a non-believer in Magus' Institutional Universal Church of Truth creates a cosmic bond between Warlock and the girl in the short time he's known her. When considered that Magus and Warlock are one and the same, and that Magus actually dispatched the girl to find Warlock, isn't the girl a part of Warlock . . . or a part of his imagination that could be warning Warlock that in the future he is destined to become Magus?

We are introduced to Matriarch in *Strange Tales* #178, and are given the impression that she is a powerful force with a heavy-handed rule, but never given a demonstration of her ruthlessness. Because Magus has already been built up to seem omnipotent, Matriarch is already thrown into the distinction of being a figurehead with no real power. Magus is a god, and Matriarch is the humanoid head of the Universal Church of Truth which worships Magus, the ultimate and supreme force.

Images of Matriarch are often unspectacular, keeping her character in line with the actual minor role she plays, but they are always regal, even at her death. We know she is doomed to die when she expresses her wish to extort Magus (via control of Warlock) and sieze rule of a thousand planets – if Magus is all-powerful, he would immediately know of her scheme, and he does. Eventually Magus kills Matriarch for her betrayal.

The paradox is that Matriarch *is* highly intelligent. By Magus' own description, she is iron-willed with a mind like a razor, but she has a backgroud that shows she was a woman of "easy morality" (*Warlock* #9) and somewhat sinister past that preordains her to betray Magus in her quest for power.

Matriarch's one good quality is her respect for her enemy – a theme oft-repeated. It shows a "human" and compassionate side of the otherwise cold and calculating Matriarch. She realizes Warlock would serve her better alive than dead, so upon capturing Adam she has him brainwashed. But she's underestimated the willpower of Warlock, and is thrice amused when he sees her "programmers" interpreted by Warlock as clowns rather than saviours of the galaxy. But nevertheless her demanding, threatening, and condescending nature prevails as she refers to Warlock as a "fool" (*Strange Tales* #181) and goes on with her plan of conquest. Is her objective to extort Magus by enslaving Warlock consistent with her razor-sharp mind or is it idealistic? Power-mad leaders must always take a risk to achieve power, and she "rolls the dice," gambling against insurmountable odds because all she wants is her kingdom. Want of power is her real fatal flaw.

The temporal leader of the Universal Church of Truth is found by Warlock, mortally wounded by Magus and left to die. With Warlock by her side, she is relieved that she doesn't have to die alone. At first she asked Adam if he were Death, arriving to deliver her from pain. She of course was expecting death, because there could only be two results of her gamble – total success of total failure. The smile on her face as she dies indicates that she welcomed death, for in defeat of this magnitude there would be no other alternative. Almost above all else, Matriarch abhorred waste, so since she was now useless, in her philosophy her own death was a just end.

Warlock, bending over her dying body, is visibly touched. His own compassion for one of his enemies goes beyond witnessing the death of a beautiful, respected woman even though she was his foe – on the totally psychological level, Warlock could not battle his evil alter ego all by himself, so the nameless girl, Matriarch and Gamora were all mental devices he used to cope with chaos of the mind. They are all doomed to die because in the end, only Warlock can defeat Warlock/Magus.

"We're all heroes in our own minds," Matriarch once told Warlock, "even me!" If you consider that Matriarch is indeed a tool of Warlock's imagination, this unveils more of a paradox. If everyone is a hero, who is the villain? Matriarch is part of Warlock's mental war, and with this statement just reminds Warlock that he *does* have to be a hero and defeat his dark side, Magus.

Gamora, the green-skinned, green-clad beauty, makes her first appearance two-thirds into *Strange Tales* #180, approaching Pip the Troll in a bar. "Hey, you!" is the first thing she says. The ensuing short conversation gives the impression of a terse, threatening, and tough lady. She's looking for Adam Warlock, saying she'd like to join him if he had a chance to defeat Magus – or kill him if he was unworthy of the task. Just as with Matriarch, Gamora's first appearance is brief but ominous, getting the stage ready for scenes to come.

Little more is revealed about Gamora in *Strange Tales* #181. Her violent nature is reinforced when a Black Knight is accosted by her. She wants to know where Warlock is being held, and the Black Knight volunteers the information readily when he sees who she is, for fear of physical harm to his body. Pip, amazed at the scene, asks just who he's rubbing elbows with. In a cliche, Gamora says she goes by many names, but the one the guard had in mind was probably "The Deadliest Woman in the Whole Galaxy." Gamora says this strong and confidently, as if proud of her brazen image. Even the background in that particular panel is colored red. Does she really want to help Warlock? Her vicious nature prompts second thoughts.

Later in that issue, Gamora sneaks into the Sacred Palace of the planet "Homeworld" (another timeless, archetypal part of Starlin's story) and fights her way toward where Warlock is being brainwashed. However, Warlock is resisting his programming and breaks free from the "input helmut" exactly when Gamora arrives, too late to actually help Warlock . . . more evidence that Gamora is there more as something pretty to look at than as a functional character. Or did Warlock know she was coming, even never having met her, and use the reassurance to break free of the brainwashing? It's like the cavalry coming to the rescue but the hero manages anyway – but if he can hear the cavalry's charge, it makes him fight harder.

More mystery enshrouds Gamora in *Warlock* #9, where she telepathically contacts the "Master." Starlin fans who read his Captain Marvel epic knew at this point the "Master" would be Thanos, Worshipper of Death. We find Gamora's mission is to assassinate Magus, who strangely represents life vs. Thanos and death. Magus foils the murder attempt, and forgets about Gamora, confident that she'll be no further threat to him. As Magus/Warlock is one entity, it shows that Warlock does know that Gamora is an insignificant part of the plot.

Gamora's past is revealed in *Warlock* #10 – she's been brought from the future by Thanos from a far-off world inhabited by the Zen Whoberis, a peace-loving race which was "purified" (eliminated) by Magus' forces when they wouldn't convert to the Universal Church of Truth. Only Gamora survived, and the experience apparently hardened her peace-loving nature.

Gamora pretty much disappears until a brief stint in *Warlock* #15, being assigned by Thanos to bodyguard Warlock, who needs to be preserved until later on in Thanos' plan for total stellar genocide. In her search for Warlock, her vessel is annihilated by someone who looks like the Destroyer (also from the Captain Marvel epic) but this logic doesn't follow – even though she is an agent of Thanos, she poses no threat of any concern to the Destroyer.

Not until six months later is the Warlock series concluded, in a big battle presented in *Avengers Annual* #7, and concluded in *Marvel Two-In-One Annual* #2. Warlock finds Gamora bleeding and dying on a dark planetoid, left to die by Thanos after she tried to assassinate him. Warlock took her soul with his Soul Gem. Later, Warlock confessed that he loved Gamora, and she could have meant much more to him, given more time. Unfortunately the Warlock series had ended six months previously and no hint of romance had ever appeared before, so this development is somewhat baffling. And so is the resolution, where Warlock and Gamora are destined to live a peaceful, strife-free, pain-free eternal existence within the Soul Gem, together – forever.

Is the ending inconsistent with all the clues hinting at Gamora's subservient role in the plot? Now she suddenly is a major part of his life. When he died, everything is changed; now he no longer needs to battle his mind, and can concentrate on other people and pleasures. for now he is at peace with himself.

POWER GIRL

The New, Improved Supergirl?

by Margaret O'Connell

"You're nothing like my cousin Supergirl!" the flustered Superman of Earth-One concluded upon meeting Power Girl for the first time in the 1977 JLA-JSA team-up (*JLA* #147). "Maybe not," PG replied, "But that's her problem!" Indeed it is. That crucial personality difference goes a long way toward explaining why Power Girl is the undisputed star of *All Star Comics* and has even had a solo try-out series in *Showcase* (#97-99), while the original Supergirl is relegated to an apparently never-ending continued story in the back of *Superman Family*.

Okay, I'm over-simplifying, Supergirl has had a lot of guest shots in the past year, too, notably in *Adventure* #450, *Super-Team Family* #11, and issues #307-309,312-315 (counting cameos) of her famous cousin's mag. And her series in *Superman Family*, scripted by Jack C. Harris, is undeniably the showpiece of the magazine. In fact, in a recent lettercol, one reader even remarked, "Supergirl is easily strong enough in all areas to be holding her own mag."

Well, DC tried that once, and apparently they didn't like the results - *Supergirl* merged with *Lois Lane* and *Jimmy Olsen* to form *Superman Family* after a mere 10 issues. But since Supergirl's burst of increased exposure this year ended almost exactly as Power Girl's began (Supergirl's last guest shot, in *Superman* #315, was dated September, 1977; Power Girl's first, the JLA-JSA team-up, was dated October, 1977), it seems almost as if they've decided to resign themselves to Supergirl's floating second rate status and start all over again with her Earth-Two counterpart. And this time, they may just do it right.

Power Girl's personality is a strong plus in her favor. For one thing, it definitely exists. Power Girl's strong character and determination not to stand in anyone's shadow, which at times verges on pushiness and even aggression, were apparent in her very first appearance, in *All Star* #58. When she saw that the aging Flash and Wildcat seemed out of their depth in fighting a raging volcano, she calmly broke her promise to Superman to "wait a few more months before revealing myself" and did the job herself. She then firmly informed the stunned JSAers that she wanted to be called Power Girl, because "it won't confuse me with my cousin," and pointed out to them that the old guard of the Justice Society had been unable to cope with any of three simultaneous disasters in different parts of the world, and that "I did the work here - while **you** stood by, almost **helpless**!" This last turned out to be due to the machinations of the villainous Brain Wave, but Power Girl's blunt approach and take-charge manner made it evident from the first that she was a far cry from the traditional super-team token female, tacitly acquiescing in her slightly less than equal status.

Nothing could be farther from Supergirl's behavior in her early adventures. The Supergirl who spent her first 33 appearances in *Action* (from her origin in #252, in May, 1959, till her public unveiling in #285) meekly obeying her cousin's arbitrary decree that she conceal her very existence from the world so she could be his "secret weapon" was so "femininely" sweet and naive that at times she seemed to have no personality at all. The success of the early Supergirl stories - and most of them are good stories - is almost entirely dependent on their strong plotting, not on their protagonist, who could be exchanged for almost anyone with super powers

without much affecting the outcome of the story.

Supergirl herself in this period was almost incredibly impressionable and romantic, having a new love interest in every other story and sincerely believing it was "the big romance of my life" every time. And she had an alarming tendency to accept the most improbable situations at face value, which made her fair game for super-villains of every sort.

Superhero comics - and most superheroines - have changed a lot since then, and Supergirl's writers now try to give her, too, a personality of her own. The only trouble is, they can't seem to agree on what it is.

Supergirl's 1977 guest shots are a case in point. In her back-up in *Adventure* #450, which co-starred Martian Manhunter and was written by Denny O'Neil, Supergirl behaved like someone who considered herself still a mere second-stringer (or perhaps a no-so-secret weapon). Although I couldn't see anything terribly wrong with her reaction to an apparent attack from J'onn J'onzz - frankly, I thought Superman would probably have done the exact same thing - the Maid of Might kept having all kinds of wistful thoughts like, "My cousin would probably know exactly what to do . . . but I don't have Superman's experience! I can only hope to hold him (J'onzz) at bay until he regains his senses!" Considering the fact that even by comic book time, Supergirl must have had at least ten years' experience as a functioning superheroine by now, this statement was patently ridiculous.

Meanwhile, over in *Superman,* then being written by Gerry Conway, the situation was just the opposite. Supergirl calmly sashayed into story after story to chew out the suddenly inept and neurotic Man of Steel for his blunders as if he were the "inexperienced" one and she were the old pro. In one three-part story that ended with issue #309, the very same month *Adventure* #450 came out, Supergirl started out by flatly telling her confused cousin that his whole origin story was a delusion, since Krypton never existed. She then continued bullying him about how he'd built his whole life around a neurotic fantasy until he was finally driven to make the memorable statement, "I'm warning you, Supergirl - don't treat me like a child!" (*Superman* #308).

Eventually it was revealed that the entire Krypton-delusion line was merely an ill-advised scheme cooked up by Supergirl and some Kandorian psychologists to cure Superman of an alarming tendency to smash factories and supertankers which he believed were killing Earth by pollution as Krypton was killed by natural disaster. This hare-brained motivation made Supergirl's behavior seem nearly as irrational and simple-minded as her cousin's. But she was back again in *Superman* #312 (written by Marty Pasko this time), almost as imperious as ever, to nag Superman about his inadequate handling of a mysterious outbreak of "journalists' disease" in Central City.

Once again the readers were treated to the unlikely sight of Supergirl confronting her cousin with words like, "You had the means to cure the disease-victims – and I want to know what happened to it!", and finally, "C'mon now . . . you've faced worse crises before – and you'll solve this one, too!" She even had to tell him what to do in the fight with the villain, Amalak, the Kryptonian-Killer, although she was the one who wound up being captured and (temporarily) held hostage.

Finally, in *Super-Team Family* #11, which came out a mere month after Supergirl scolded the Man of Steel in his own mag, Gerry Conway, not satisfied with his previous characterization of the Maid of Might, put some rather unsettling words into her temporary teammates' mouths. After Supergirl unwittingly disrupted their plans by rounding up some crooks they'd hoped would lead them to their boss, the Flash groused, "If there's one thing that drives me up the wall . . . it's a pushy teenager." The Atom merely replied, "Supergirl's no teenager, Flash . . . she just acts like one." This was all the more disconcerting because the only thing at all unusual about Supergirl's behavior was that her manner was slightly breezier than usual, while Flash and Atom spent most of the time after she appeared acting like a pair of sulky ten year olds.

Obviously Supergirl still isn't the kind of character who makes a strong impression on readers – or even writers – by sheer force of personality. Even so, it's hard to build up a following for a character who acts like a different person every time she appears.

This is one problem Power Girl has never had. You may love her or hate her, or merely find her a pleasant change from the more easily taken for granted traditional type of heroine, but you can be pretty sure that there are certain things she will and won't do, no matter what else happens

in the story. This greater consistency is largely due to the fact that in all her appearances so far, Power Girl has always been handled by the same two writers – first Gerry Conway and then Paul Levitz. On the other hand, with all the different places Supergirl has appeared and all the different writers she's had, it's no wonder she sometimes seems slightly schizophrenic. DC needs to set some kind of unified editorial policy on how to handle this woman, and fast.

There is one other thing about Power Girl that I believe has contributed to her quick rise in popularity so far. This is the fact that shw was, and still is, to a certain extent, a woman of mystery. Readers eagerly devoured each story in which she appeared not just for its own sake, but in the hope of finding out who the Crom she was.

The first issue of the revived *All Star Comics* revealed nothing except that she was the Earth-Two Superman's cousin. No one even knew which cousin – Kara Zor-El or some other – until *All Star* #69, nearly two years later, in which Commissioner Bruce Wayne, the retired Batman of Earth-Two, called her "Kara" on the last page. Even the mystery of why she looked young enough to be the Earth-Two Superman's granddaughter, especially puzzling in the light of the fact that Superman was supposedly the only survivor of Krypton in the Earth-Two universe (which means no free-floating Argo City where Kara could later be born), wasn't elucidated until *All Star* #62, the fifth bi-monthly revival issue. In this issue Power Girl and Superman got into an argument in which she finally blurted out, "We were **both** infants when our parents sent us away from Krypton – is it my fault that my father designed a **slower** rocket? That I stayed young – in suspended animation – arriving on Earth years **after** you began your career?"

Until her try-out in *Showcase*, these tantalizing scraps of information were literally all that fandom knew of Power Girl's past. Even then, although her origin and journey to Earth were very fully and satisfyingly detailed in *Showcase* #97-98, the readers had to wait until *Showcase* #99 to find out for sure whether or not she even had a secret identity.

As it turned out, she didn't, but the secret identity she finally chose, at the urging of Andrew Vinson, a brash young reporter she had met in *Showcase* #97, was a severe disappointment. Some sense of letdown when the suspense about this important aspect of Power Girl's life finally ended was probably inevitable. But this secret identity didn't even make sense. Instead of merely eliminating PG's air of mystery (though I'd still like to know where she lived during her first two years on Earth, especially when her existence was supposed to be a secret – in the Fortress of Solitude?), it also added something extremely irritating – total implausibility.

I don't care how great an expert on software and computers in general Power Girl became after a week with a memory teacher brought by Wonder Woman from Paradise Island. I simply don't believe that the "world's largest computer service corporation" would hire someone without even a college degree, especially "on a rather mysterious 'no questions asked' basis." Especially when the only person said someone has to recommend her is a young reporter from the *Daily Globe* whose connection with this or any computer company remains a mystery. Businesses just don't operate that way – not unless they want to get in trouble with the government about filling out social security forms for employess who apparently don't exist. "Karen Starr," Power Girl's new alter ego, evidently doesn't have so much as a birth certificate, though it would seem relatively easy for someone with such an important relative to fake one.

To make things even worse, PG's hasty departure when a underling rushed up to the personnel director who was showing her around to announce that "Keystone City just vanished from our nationwide computer network!" all but blew her cover before she'd even started work. Even the easy going personnel director, Dr. Ginsberg, was moved to inquire, "Why is she in

(continued on page 19)

CLUB NEWS by Nick Chinn

Here we are, and with a 40-page THS #14, albeit a little bit late due to a couple of conventions and a lead feature commitment that was not honored, throwing our production schedule a long ways off. Our thanks though to CHFC members, staffers and friends who came by our tables to see Steve and I at Bay Con in San Francisco, and for seeing just Steve at the San Diego Con a week later. Unfortunately I didn't get to go down to San Diego – I was broke for the umpteenth time since I got back into comics collecting a couple few years ago.

Missing Subscribers Dept. - We "found" Joanna P. Moore of Richmond, IN (now Joanna P. Fenton of San Francisco, CA), but we still need current addresses for the following people so we can send them the zines that they've paid for: Jerald Magia (formerly of Los Angeles, CA); Wes Smith (Paw-Paw, MI); and John P. Wentworth (Alhambra, CA). Unless *you* want to end up in our dead account file, *please* send Steve a forwarding address when you move. If you move back and forth from college, we'll try to accommodate you, but you must keep us notified.

Mailed out to CHFC subscribers with TA #7 was a bonus of the *THA Index*. It is available for 35¢ to anyone else interested, and will be sent free to anyone placing an order for a set of back issues.

Thanks go out to John & Cindy Butler for helping Steve collate THS #13; to Lynne Pope who helped me collate TA #7 (yes, Steve finally caught up with me, but he still had to collate the *THA Index* by himself). And to Adrienne Foster for working with Steve to staple and trim those issues.

Work is progressing on THS/UK #2. Look for it soon. It should be something special. Work on The Heroine Directory has been shelved until after THS/UK #2 is completed.

Our special thanks to Steve Leialoha for providing the cover art to this issue.

Fortunately everything here at CHFC headquarters is not "work, work, work," and we do have time for fun stuff, although even right now there is still a load of work to do to complete this ish. Steve, along with the able-handed assistance of staff artist Brent Anderson, recently cooked up this illustration bombshell and mailed it to me. For those of you not paying attention to *The Adventuress,* the illo is in reference to my "Ixiona" fiction series (I can't defend its quality to those of you who criticized it if you do don't understand what exactly I'm doing). Let me say right now that I never saw the series to be akin to what is alluded here – Steve got the big idea, and it was not my idea to intentionally do a takeoff on "Charlie's Angels." You might be interested in knowing that most of the characters used in the story are not of my creation . . . they just somehow found their way into the plotline.

Now appearing in *The Adventuress:*

CHIRON'S ANGELS

There is no art auction bid sheet with this mailing because other contingencies dictate that we keep the original art intact a little longer. It will be sent out with TA #8 or THS #15 though, so don't think we're hoarding all the art!

A TV VIEW:

NANCY Got The Shaft

When ABC-TV's series "The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries" premiered in January of 1977, it was with the mutual understanding between producers and viewers that the program was dedicated to the proposition that boy and girl detectives were created equal. Unfortunately it was a noble gesture which was soon abandoned.

As a mid-season replacement, the program's first season consisted of 12 programs with 6 reserved for The Hardys' adventures and 6 featuring Nancy Drew. But the equality began and ended there. When the summer re-run period was in swing, the series' producers decided to put the young dectictives to the test: Rather than alternating their stories, they opted to rebroadcast all six Nancy Drew episodes first, followed by the balance of Hardy Boy adventures. In this way, the appeal of each show could be measured more accurately. Sadly, Nancy failed miserably.

Her ratings were always "in the cellar," so to speak. Twice she achieved the dubious distinction of being the week's lowest-rated program. The Hardy Boys episodes which followed did considerably better. Consequently, when the series began anew in the fall, the primary focus was on Frank and Joe, with Nancy assuming a distinctly supporting role.

The '77 Season Premiere was a 2-part Hardy Boy story which guested Ms. Drew. Three weeks later, Nancy was featured in another Hardy two-parter. This was followed by a number of Hardy Boy solo stories, with no sign of the show's distaff detective. Finally, in December, ABC aired 3 brand new solo Nancy Drew episodes.

Shortly thereafter, ABC announced that actress Pamela Sue Martin had left the role. Reports varied, but the truth that emerged was this: Pamela didn't want to play second fiddle to her male co-stars. The straw that had broken the camel's back was when the producers told her that they were dropping solo Nancy Drew stories; that, heretofore, she would appear only when teamed with The Hardys. Pamela Sue was even offered a $5,000 per show salary raise, which she refused. *(Editor's note - Ms. Martin subsequently denied being offered a raise.)*

Consequently, Janet Lousie Johnson, an unknown, was brought in to fill the role for 3 late episodes with Frank and Joe Hardy. In all probability, the television series, which has remained popular despite tough competition from CBS's "60 Minutes," will be renewed for next season, likely featuring Drew/Hardy team-ups and occasional Hardy Boys solos.

Succinctly, Nancy Drew got the shaft. While the teeny-bopper appeal of actor/singer Shaun Cassidy is largely responsible for the series' success, ABC unwittingly favored The Hardys segments by giving them better and more promotional and advertising plugs than they allotted Nancy. In addition, they aired this season's 3 solo Nancy Drew Mysteries in December, a month notorious for poor ratings in general, since it is filled primarily with re-runs and Holiday specials. Fewer people have time to watch television.

The girl sleuth's adventures were generally better written and better acted than those of her male counterparts. The Hardy segments have relied too heavily on exotic locations and musical numbers by Shaun (Joe Hardy) Cassidy. The 'mystery' angle of the show has too often been forsaken for these.

TV Guide's review of the show concurs, saying that Pamela Sue Martin is a better actor involved in better mysteries.

Alas, the ratings disagree, and they are gospel in television-land. Hence, heroine fans can expect to see sustantially less of one of TV's brightest girl detectives next season.

- Scott Gibson

TAANDA

"The Headhunters of Bullah" - *7 pgs.*

White Princess of the Jungle #4 - *Aug. 1952*

Golden Age Girls

by Steve Johnson

"Taanda – White Princess of the Jungle – raised by Tauruti Chief Upatani when her missionary parents died, swore she would fight those who would despoil the jungle through evil. Now, with her native ward, Koru, she faced an army of fercious savages, who swooped down on the Congo on a blood-curdling mission of death – killing all who dared oppose – The Headhunters of Bullah!"

Taanda and Koru are returning from the large seaport of Otan with supplies for the Tauruti kraal (village) when Koru spots activity on a swift-flowing stream. The current brings two boats into view, the first containing two terror-stricken natives, and the second, a war party of the dreaded Headhunters of Bullah.

A spear pierces one of the fleeing men and Taanda sprints towards the river's edge to aid in the uneven struggle. Swinging overhead through the giant trees surrounding a bend in the river, she waits tensely on an overhanging branch as the boats draw closer. Bringing all her skill to bear, she swings from the limb and snatches the terrified native from certain death.

The stream quickly carries the Bullah warriors past Taanda and their quarry, but not before they swear to avenge themselves of the insult that the White Princess has brought upon them by cheating them of their victory.

The rescued villager tells of the massacre of his people the previous dusk by the Bullah, and that only a few escaped. Taanda leaps toward a vine and swings into the veldt with grim purpose – to go to the Bullah camp . . . a mission where one false step can mean doom for all neighboring tribes.

After hours of journey, she finds the Bullah worshipping Xip-Ho-Mon and learns that it is this God of War that commands the Bullah to go to war so they will have a good harvest.

Taanda hears all she wants to know. Once again she swiftly makes her way back through the underbrush but not before examining still another place the camp of white trader Klegman who is busy loading piles of Bullah treasure!

Reaching her Taurati village she councils with the elders. Drumbeats are heard through the jungle and all night warriors of the neighboring tribes stream into the village and ally themselves with Chief Upatani. By dawn they are awaiting battle as the headhunters arrive.

A fierce battle ensues but is quickly brought to a conclusion as Taanda puts her strategy into play. Igniting

Costume: Orange leopard skin with head band
Hair: Red

hidden bales of dried twigs all about the gate, the Bullah savages are hemmed in by a ring of burning death. Taanda then brings on her elephant friends and threatens to trample the huddled warriors unless they surrender.

Subdued, the Bullah listen as Taanda tells them of the treachery of Trader Klegman. She then leads them on an attack against Klegman, only to have the charge halted when Xip-Ho-Mon puts in a personal appearance. Taanda quickly unmasks the god as Klegman and with a thrust of her knife puts an end to him "as a warning to any of your kind who bring unrest to the Congo."

Taanda's adventures have to be noted for their graphic presentation of violence. Not a story passed without someone being pierced by a spear, shot through the neck with an arrow, impaled on a sword, or gutted with a knife. About half the time the broken flesh is shown, and then only slightly off panel in the other half. And as often as not, it was Taanda perpetrating the act.

Appearing frequently in the episodes was Capt. Stevens of the British Grenadiers. His resources seemed pretty good as, in aiding Taanda, he was able to summon an entire regiment of soldiers, or order up a squadron of fighter planes to attack a swamp beast.

Art on the series varied all the way from beautiful covers, frontspieces, and strips in #2 & #3 (reprinted in *Jungle Adventures* #1) by Everett Raymond Kinstler, to the mediocre Louis Raviella in #1, to the competent but unexciting Fawcette & Alascia in #4,5.

Stories are a little crowded and rushed at times, leading to a little confusion. But what can be expected when you have to squeeze a major jungle uprising, organization of the mightest army in Africa as opposition, quelling of the uprising, and a one-on-one combat between Taanda and the villianess all into 7 pages. And all this before Capt. Stevens returns with British troops! (Story reprinted in *Jungle Adventures* #3.)

If you can't afford the originals (which are not yet outrageously priced), and don't mind Jack Katz's "Zangar" lead feature, the Skywald *Jungle Adventures* are exceptional values. Besides the White Princess reprints in #1 & #3, there were reprints of Sheena (from *Sheena* #17 and *Jumbo* #162) and Slave Girl in issue #2, along with Jo-Jo, Congo King reprints in all three issues. Of course you do have to put up with some coloring errors as Taanda appears as a blonde in 2 of the stories and raven-haired in the third, while at least once being referred to as "flame-haired" in the text. The reprints also add a little color to her wardrobe, but basically her outfit was orange, though in later interior stories, it lost its leopard spots.

An inconsistency arises when you note that in her origin in #1, Taanda's parents, Bwana Simmons and wife, were explorers, and in this story in #4 they are missionaries. And on an odd note, the White Princess' name was changed to Tarinda in the last issue of her book. Was someone pressing a law suit? Perhaps we'll never know.

****

"The White Princess of the Jungle" appeared in:

Jungle Adventures #18 (1964)
rpt. White Princess #1 (origin)

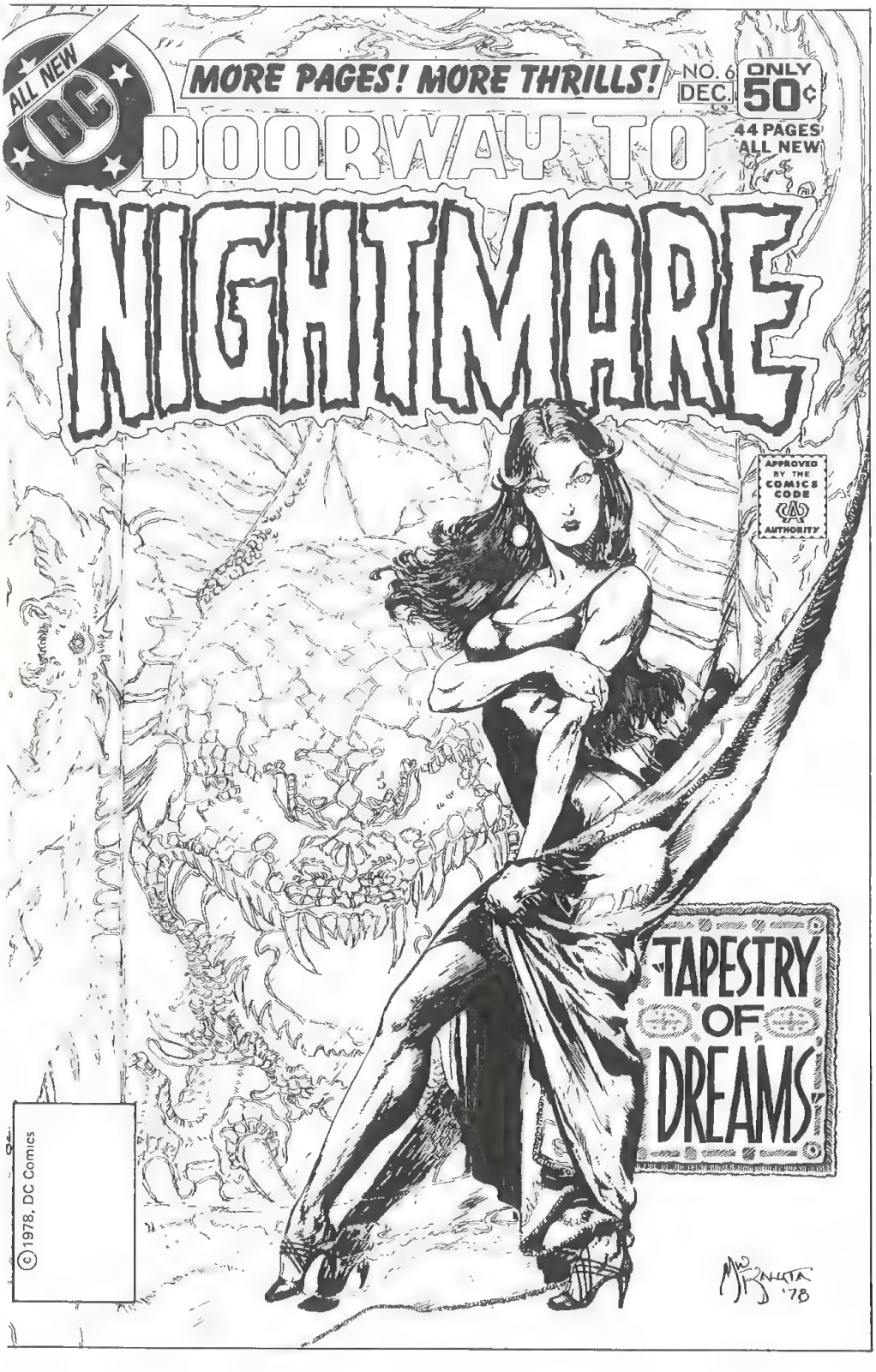
Jungle Adventures #1,3 (Mar., June 1971)
#1 rpts. from W.P. #2,3; #3 rpt. & text feature from W.P. #3(?)

Top Jungle #1 (1964)
rpts. W.P. #3 (minus cover)

White Princess of the Jungle #1-5 (July 1951 - Nov. 1952)
cover app. #1-5; 3 stories in each

****

Steven R. Johnson, P.O. Box 1329, Campbell, CA 95008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TAROT READINGS

BY CAT YRONWODE

"Perhaps you've passed it before, taking no notice. And indeed, it does *blend in well with the other myriad little shops along Christy Street: the cluttered window displays, the signs proclaiming knowledge of the esoteric and the occult – all fit snugly into the exotic lifestyle of New York's old East Village . . . However, had you by chance* heeded *the intriguing invitation on the door, it may still have done you little good. For mere curiousity-seekers most often find the shop* locked *– while those in genuine* need *ever seem to find it* open . . . *and waiting . . . for this is an emporium of* truth. *And while to some it can be the gate to a world of realized* dreams *– to others it must ever remain a terrible . . . DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE.*

With these chilling words begins the first episode of one of the strangest "heroine" comics to ever come out of the DC offices. In fact, it is problematical whether the nominal protagonist of *Doorway to Nightmare,* the tarot-reading Madame Xanadu, *is* a heroine in the sense that one normally uses the word. This, and a few other usually-crucial points in the background of any comic book character, such as her origin and the source of her powers "must", in the words of a caption on the second page of the premier issue, "stay for us, a mystery."

It is a mystery which we are likely never to see solved, for *Doorway to Nightmare,* like countless other heroine comics before it, has been cancelled, in this case, after a mere five issues. This does not signal the end of Madame Xanadu's career, however. Paul Kupperberg of DC has stated that "there are tentative plans to use already completed material in some of the other mystery titles in the near future," and one hope that with some encouragement from interested readers of *The Heroines Showcase,* Madame Xanadu will not fade into that vast limbo reserved for women in comics.

But who *is* Madame Xanadu, the proprietress of an "emporium of truth," the woman of mystery? She lives, as do a certain other famous pair of sorcerers, in New York's Greenwich Village. However, unlike Marvel's Doctor Strange and Clea, she is quite open about her work – she runs a card-reading establishment which also functions as the semi-public storehouse for her rather ominous collection of human souls, a collection which is displayed in jars all about the dimly-lit room where she entertains her "clients." Obviously either prescient or telepathic, and seemingly immortal (in issue #3, she and an ageless vampire discuss "old times"), she receives her authority, if not her power, from some unknown occult order or spiritual being who does not "allow" her to do more than "advise" the people who seek her aid. These clients follow a certain pattern – in issues 1 and 5 they are women in love with men who are beset by some supernatural menace, whereas in issues 2, 3, and 4, they are men in love with women who are beset by some supernatural menace. In most cases, Madame Xanadu's major goal seems to be to capture the soul of the supernatural menace and put it into a jar; the actual rescue of the threatened lover is accomplished by the client. With only one exception, the star-crossed lovers are united by the last page and everyone lives happily ever after.

Doorway to Nightmare is a strange blend of three distinctly different genres of comic literature. The facial close-ups of tear-stained lovers in heart-shaped panels, the symbolic half-eaten apple at the feet of a silhouetted couple kissing beneath a full moon (these scenes beautifully rendered by Romeo Tanghal in issue 5), and the basic theme of young-lovers-in-trouble derive from the "romance" titles of the fifties and sixties, a type best exemplified by the long-defunct *My Secret Marriage* and *My True Romance.*

The second major influence on D.T.N. is the "mystery" or "weird horror" comic. This is where the supernatural menaces fit in – they are the typical crew of extra-dimensional demons, vampires and ancient sorceries from Egypt and the Orient which have long been a mainstay of

titles such as *Secrets of the Haunted House* and the pre-super-heroic *Journey Into Mystery.* Madame Xanadu does not exactly narrate the tales in the ghoulish "hostess" tradition of EC's Old Witch, but one can see a definite family resemblance in the way she smiles to herself while dusting off those gruesome soul-jars. DC's decision to print the remainder of the unpublished D.T.N. stories in one of their mystery titles indicates that they view her primarily as a member of this class of characters.

This is an unfortunate simplification, for Madame Xanadu is more – she is also one of the few protagonists of magical-heroines in comics. This rarely-successful genre is best exemplified by *Dr. Strange,* with its half-decadent opulence and fierce struggles for order on the astral planes. Of course, Madame Xanadu, being only an "advisor," does not engage in mystical battles herself, but, like the American "advisors" in Viet Nam, she comes awfully close. Meanwhile, under her direction, various of the star-crossed lovers find that they possess an "all-powerful energy force" which looks suspiciously like the stock-in-trade "demoniac bolts of bedevilment" familiar to readers of heroic-sorcery comics. The fact that Madame Xanadu is obviously intent on vanquishing evil adds to the impression that, beneath her veil of disinterested advisorship, she is a true heroine and not just a mere ghoulish mystery "hostess."

In its short run, *Doorway to Nightmare* boasted as many author-artist teams as there were issues, another trait peculiar to mystery titles, and the only continuous presence was that of the cover artist, Michael W. Kaluta. His renditions of Madame Xanadu are themselves worth the price of the comic, and the first three rank with the best work he did on *The Shadow,* depicting the protagonist in a variety of seductive and sensual-yet-menacing poses. The illustration accompanying this article is Kaluta's drawing for the non-existent issue 6. One reason I personally regret the cancellation of D.T.N. is that with its passing there will be that much less evidence of Kaluta's now-minimal involvement with comics.

The quality of the interior art and scripting in D.T.N. varies wildly from issue to issue, as a brief history of the title will show.

Number 1, by David Michelinie and Val Mayerik, recounts the tale of an aspiring actress whose lover, a playwright, is being used by his set decorator as a donor of "soul energy" to prevent her death by cancer. The set decorator turns out to be Tutankhamen's daughter, kept alive these many years throught an occult ritual involving shaven-headed priests and "proportional pyramid power." Madame Xanadu, after capturing a minor demon, advises the actress to break the pyramid, an act which ages the pharoah's daughter in the best EC tradition of dripping eyeballs, leaving the woman's soul in Xanadu's possession, and the reunited lovers in possession of each other. The witty use of such current topics as Tutankhamen and pyramid power, combined with Mayerik's boney-faced characters, give this story an unusal degree of adult charm.

Issue number 2 is another matter altogether. Illustrated by Vincente Alcazar, it features one of scripter Gerry Conway's seemingly patented sexist plots. The victim this time is an uppity and asexual scientist named Melissa Mann (get it?), who is advised by Xanadu that she is tampering with forces not meant to be tampered with, and eventually succeeds in opening a dimensional doorway to a continuum inhabited by demons. Her personality changes and she goes from being frigid to nymphomaniac, as well as giving up her vegetarian diet. Her distraught lover uses a book of spells supplied by Xanadu to exorcise the demon which has possessed her, and, as is to be expected in a Conway story, the scientist, properly punished for her "mannish" independence, is reduced to a gentle and fragile helplessness, desiring only to be held in the strong arms of a "real man." I don't know what this author has against powerful women, but he seems incapable of creating one who is not either amnesiac or frigid. Or both.

D.T.N. 3 gives a larger role to Madame Xanadu, as an ancient vampire who is a long-time friend of hers decides to give up his life rather than corrupt that of the woman he loves. The script, by Roger McKenzie (from a plot by Bill Kunkel and Joyce Katz) goes a long way to liven up the rather pedestrian art of Ric Estrada and Romeo Tanghal, and the subliminal messages supplied by Xanadu's use of tarot cards also lift the story to a high, if not 100% accurate, level of occult thrills.

Number 4, "Six Claws Of The Dragon," written by Catherine B. Andrews and Stuart Hopen and illustrated by Johnny Craig, is a tastily refried Sax Rohmer tale, from the ancient cursed Chinese artifacts right on down to the interacial love affair between a policeman and a woman possessed by the spirit of her wicked ancestress. Hypnotism, mummies, birthmarks, and all the traditional peraphenalia of a rainy night in Chinatown make this a classic pulp story into which Madame Xanadu fits surprisingly well. Her unexplained ownership of a stolen lamp crucial to the plot, and her completely unexpected custodianship of the displaced soul of the victimized woman until it can be returned to its rightful body, make her a central, yet utterly cryptic player in the drama.

The last issue of D.T.N., number 5, is probably the most perfect blend of romance, mystery and magical-heroic fiction I've ever seen. The 25 page format of DC's new 50¢ line has enabled writer Scott Edelman and artist Romeo Tanghal and Vince Colleta to develop the characters and the purposely ambiguous plot to an extent not usually seen in either romance or mystery titles, while providing room for a full-scale occult battle in the best *Strange Tales* tradition. A young man who has fallen in with evil companions is taken by his worried lover to Madame Xanadu's, in the hopes that her advice will cause him to see the errors of his ways. Instead, he succumbs to temptation and steals a golden soul-jar, hoping to fence it for fifty bucks. Back at the hang-out of his motorcycle gang, he opens the jar and is possessed by the demon within it, which leads to his assumption of authority over the gang as a first step to total world domination. His lover, pursued by the bikers, manages to make her way to Xanadu's, only to be told that, like The Watcher, the tarot reader can do nothing to help the situation. However, Xanadu looks the woman in the eyes until "an odd tingling pervades her bones" and she acquires an aura of yellow magical force. A sorcerous fight then ensues between the demon-possessed biker and the woman who loves him, a fight which terminates in a victory for love. This isn't the end of the story, however, as it appears that everything after the theft of the soul-jar was an interiour drama concocted by Madame Xanadu, and, with a sense of deja vu, the man overcomes temptation, doesn't steal the jar after all and, tossing away his biker's jacket, decides to go to college.

As we all know, women are not popular in comics. Few heroines sell enough copies to justify their own titles. It was almost a forgone conclusion that *Doorway to Nightmare*, featuring neither a simple "heroine" nor a grisly "hostess," but rather the best of both, would find it hard to succeed. It is my hope that Madame Xanadu will not fade into obscurity with the cancellation of her own title. Letters from the readers of this magazine to DC Comics might ensure her a regular back-up spot in one of their mystery titles, while it is still my fond, albeit unlikely, desire to see her guest star in a gothic Gotham epic with The Batman. But alas, for now Madame Xanadu's fate must remain, as she herself has always been . . . a mystery.

(continued from page 10)
such a hurry suddenly?" Andrew Vinson's titillating answer – "I told you, Doc – she's a special lady" – was hardly calculated to allay his suspicions. And since Karen Starr, computer expert, looks exactly like Power Girl except for her clothes, her eventual exposure seems almost inevitable. I can't imagine how Levitz will weasel out of this one.

Will her new secret identity ruin Power Girl's uniqueness by plunging her into the same hackneyed plot situations that have beset Supergirl for years? Or will her strong personality and ever unpredictable relationships with her fellow JSAers, especially the newly-arrived Huntress, help her remain "everything that Supergirl could've been," but wasn't? Only the goddesses (and Paul Levitz) know for sure. But while we're waiting to find out, let's hope that both heroines find some spot where they can appear regularly more than six times a year. Even the Huntress is scheduled to get more exposure than that, and she's barely made her debut. - **M.O'C.**

RED-HOT SONJA

part two

BY JEFF THOMPSON

"You must *do something about Red Sonja's new costume! I mean, what if that thing ever rusted shut?"*

That comical complaint was addressed to Stan Lee at the 1975 Atlanta Comics and Fantasy Fair by a twentyish woman in attendance at Lee's Saturday morning confab. After the laughter had died down, the creator of Spider-Man, Hulk, *et al ad infinitum,* retorted, "Well, do you *guys* think we oughta change Sonja's costume?" A chorus of basso "no's" followed Stan Lee's query.

It seems as though everyone who ever has read a story or two featuring the alluring Red Sonja of Hyrkania has one opinion or another about her which is *definite* – we fans know how the crimson-tressed She-Devil With a Sword despises wishy-washy manlings (yes, and sisters too)! The Robert E. Howard character of nouveau superstar status is the kind which inspires instant fervor or hatred in her readers. It is to the stunning Hyrkanian's credit – and certainly to the credit of Sonja's Marvel Comics artistic staff (Frank Thorne, Roy Thomas, Clair Noto, John Buscema, Doug Moench, Esteban Maroto, and others) – that the feelings of fervor among fandom outnumber the sourpusses over four to one.

After almost two years of solo stories (in *Kull and the Barbarians* and *Marvel Feature*), Red Sonja was reunited with Conan the Cimmerian in a spectacular, five-part cross-over saga in the pages of *Conan the Barbarian* #66 and *Marvel Feature* #6 (September 1976), *Conan* #67 (October 1976), and *Marvel Feature* #7 and *Conan* #68 (November 1976). In the epic adventure penned by Roy Thomas and illustrated by Frank Thorne (M.F.) and John Buscema (C.T.B.) a merchant named Publio hires Conan and his paramour, Belit, to travel to Messantia, capital of Argos, to steal for him a missing page from The Iron-Bound Book of Skelos, a fabled tome of necromancy – but old Karanthes, priest of Ibis, has commissioned Red Sonja of Hykania to do the same thing! Upon the sword-wielder's eventual confontation, Sonja cattily calls Belit Conan's "serving wench" and the two women engage in a dazzling sword-and-dagger fight. In the confusion, Sonja pilfers the valuable Skelos parchment and flees, leaving Conan to face a ferocious man-tiger.

Sonja takes the page to Karanthes, but Conan and Belit catch up with her. The trio has another skirmish – but then a demon sent by the god Set steals the coveted page! Conan stops another petty fight between Sonja and Belit and, after enlisting the aid of King Kull of Valusia, the troupe recovers the page. In the end, however, neither Sonja nor Conan is allowed by writer Thomas to win the page; instead, it is consumed in a Stygian blaze. Sort of reminds you of those old races between Superman and Flash, no?

At the conclusion of their adventure together, Red Sonja and Conan (with Belit) go their separate ways, after a dubious truce has been established between Sonja and Belit. According to raconteur Roy, "Then, as the Hyrkanian rides off eastward – and the other two toward the west – only Conan of Cimmeria deigns to glance backward for a moment. And, if Belit notices it, riding at his side, she says nothing. He is hers, at least

for now . . . and that will have to do."

Two months later, it was not *Marvel Feature* #8 which bursts forth from the newsstands – but *Red Sonja* #1, produced by Roy Thomas, Clair Noto, and the inimitable Mr. Thorne, with Ed Summer! "BY POPULAR DEMAND!" proclaimed the savage Thorne cover, which was reminiscent of the cover of *Conan the Barbarian* #1 six years earlier. "FABULOUS FIRST ISSUE! FIRE AND FURY IN THE AGE OF CONAN!" To the delight of every Sonja fan, the savage Hyrkanian beauty had come of four-color age.

The story of *Red Sonja* #1 (January 1977) was the truly inspired and unforgettable fantasy, "The Blood of the Unicorn." In it, Sonja is forced to slay her suffering horse, who has broken a leg. After a while of walking through the Argossean forest, she spies an exquisite ivory unicorn being mistreated by some men who want its alabaster horn. The supposedly enchanted horn of the unicorn breaks off of the beast's forehead and it is seized by Andar of Bezfarda. Red Sonja leads the frightened creature away, and in the days to come, develops a feeling of empathy, togetherness, and true love with the steed unlike any other relationship in her young life. "Two strong hearts, they journey on . . . no longer as master and beast, but still side-by-side as companions now, keeping to seldom-used paths and backroads, away from the company of men who would not understand this unspoken, nigh-mystic tie."

Soon Red Sonja notices that the unicorn's horn is growing back and its full strength is returning. Eventually Andar and his lackeys ambush the woman and unicorn and Andar readies to kill Sonja. The valiant unicorn saves his mistress' life by impaling Andar of Bezfarda upon its regenerated horn!

Also, the beautiful Hyrkanian is unlucky at love of any nature, and "The Blood of the Unicorn" concludes on a bittersweet note reminiscent of those tear-jerking, so-called "women's movies" of the 1930's and 1940's. To wit: "Then, in the still enfolding darkness, Sonja leads the great phantom beast on until they reach the border which marks the end of one Argossean province and the beginning of another. There, she suddenly senses that the beast is unwilling to go further . . . and her heart grows cold as she sees how large and strong the horn has grown. Next moment, he snorts and rears, more wild than she has ever seen him! *His* heart, *too,* is torn . . . and the choice is not so much for either to make, as it is already made by Fate; for each must follow his own destiny. The unicorn must again travel his elusive path, riderless and free . . . and Red Sonja must fulfill her own warrior's destiny – to roam and seek her fortune in strange lands among strange men – alone."

Can you tell that this story is my personal favorite of all of Red Sonja's adventures to date? It is, with "The Day of the Sword" (in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3) as runner-up. "The Blood of the Unicorn" encapsulates those ever-present themes in Sonja's stories of her eternal isolation and constantly-thwarted happiness – and it sensitively illustrates today's ideas about the many varieties of love, however extraordinary they may be. Red Sonja, who is "half-magic" herself (due to her supernatural origin experience in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3), felt an affinity to the white unicorn, who was of an enchanted species extant only in illusory, fabled lands such as Sonja's. At last Sonja was truly happy, if only for a fleeting instant. Red Sonja of Hyrkania seems to be a tragic figure not unlike Barnabas Collins of "Dark Shadows" fame – a tortured soul languishing in an existence strangled by sorrow. As Charlotte Vale (played by Bette Davis) lamented in the classic 1942 film, "Now, Voyager" – "I'm immune to happiness."

In case you are wondering how Sonja could have ridden the unicorn or even associated with him because of the unicorn legend's stipulation that only virgins may ride them, consider that the unicorn had lost his horn when Sonja had accosted him and therefore was imperfect, just as Sonja's virginity had been "spoiled" by the nameless rapist in "The Day of the Sword" (and by any subsequent close encounters which our heroine probably has had!). Going beyond mere physical conditions, another bond existed between the "imperfect" unicorn and Red Sonja in that the latter's very sould had been tainted by numerous traumas and an unnatural urge to maim and kill. Ultimately, when the unicorn's horn grew back and he became complete again, he reluctantly severed his tie with Sonja. Freud and Jung, where are you when we need you?

In late 1976, Red Sonja's popularity hit one of its several-to-date peaks when the Hyrkanian

She-Devil With a Sword proved that, just like "Star Trek," Perry Rhodan, and old-time radio, she too was famous enough to have a large-scale fan convention devoted chiefly to her! The SonjaCon was held at a New Jersey Travelodge on November 20 and 21, 1976, with guests Frank Thorne, Roy Thomas, Howie Chaykin (who had illustrated Sonja in *Kull and the Barbarians* #3 and elsewhere), Legion/X-Men artist Dave Cockrum, and other Sonjaphiles (including Wendy Pini, who was the winner of the Sonja Lookalike Contest). The panel discussions, art shows, costume contests, comics-trading, and the overall enthusiasm at the 1976 SonjaCon graphically illustrated that the red-haired warrior-woman of Marvel Comics is here to stay!

"The Demon in the Maze" in *Red Sonja* #2 (March 1977) is noteworthy because it was inspired by one of co-writer Clair Noto's dreams! In the exciting story (which contained elements of the Greek myth of Theseus and Ariadne and of Ray Harryhausen's "Jason and the Argonauts"), Sonja must traverse a demon-filled maze in Venzia, Argos. She obtains a peculiar bag of human bones from a dying mage, who instructs her to hurl the bones out of the pouch when she encounters evil in the labyrinth. She later does empty the bag – and a sword-wielding army of animated skeltons is the bizarre result!

Red Sonja #3 (May 1977) – In Athor, Sonja frees some slaves and meets a dashing wanderer named Mikal, who was to be her travelling companion for four issues! Mikal asks Sonja to accompany him to the Games of Gita at Zotoz. The Hyrkanian participates in the Olympic-like competition and then has a run-in with a spider-woman (no relation to Gale Sondergaard or Marvel's Jessica Drew!). Red Sonja declines the Zotozian throne and prepares to depart. Brown-haired Mikal exclaims, "Hold, Sonja! If you must go, there's no need for you to ride alone. I'll get a horse and go with you." Red Sonja of Hyrkania's wary reply is, "For a while, perhaps – but *only* for a while!"

Red Sonja and Mikal go on to encounter a macabre, underwater village of monsters (#4, July) and (in #5, September) a two-headed dragon. During that latter adventure, ("Master of the Bells," by Thomas/Noto/Thorne), Sonja gets separated from Mikal and sets out to find him – and a lot more – at a mystical place mentioned to her by the underwater race called the Singing Tower.

Red Sonja's next appearance was in the pages of her initial comics home, *Conan the Barbarian.* The September 1977 issue (#78) featured a color reprint of the black-and-white "Curse of the Undead-Man" from *The Savage Sword of Conan* #1. Freely adapted from Robert E. Howard's short story, "Mistress of Death," this story was the first to depict Sonja in her famous coin bikini! Around the time of this *Conan* appearance, Big Red co-starred with the Cimmerian again in a reprint of "The Song of Red Sonja" (*Conan* #23) in the oversized *Marvel Treasury Edition* #15. Also included in the volume was a trio of full-page (9" x 12"!) drawings.

Despite Red Sonja's own bi-monthly comic book, she has not stopped appearing occasionally in Marvel's black and white barbarian books as well. Witness *The Savage Sword of Conan* #23 (October 1977), which was almost one-half Red Sonja! Sonja appeared on the cover and the stunning frontspiece, was the subject of a poem enjoyably written and illustrated by Wendy Pini and of a photo-article by Chris Padovano, and appeared on a pin-up page with the beautiful white unicorn from *Red Sonja* #1! Oh, yes – she also starred in a twelve-page solo story courtesy of Roy Thomas, Clair Noto, and Frank Thorne, "Wizards of the Black Sun!" That story introduced Djali, a three-legged talking goat – and the less said about him here (or *anywhere*), the better . . .

In "The Singing Tower" in *Red Sonja* #6 (November 1977) – co-written by Wendy Pini, Sonja's sexy modern reincarnation Red Sonja is carried inside an incredibly phallic-looking tower and is suspended in bondage, meters above the floor, alongside a woman who is a giant. Sonja is reunited with Mikal, but says farewell to him after insisting that it is time for them to go their separate ways. Mikal, who is the rightful ruler of Zotoz, remains at the Singing Tower and Sonja departs, casting away a souvenir ring which Mikal had given to her. Never let it be said that Red Sonja is overly sentimental!

Red Sonja's next "boyfriend" (who has endured through the present issues) was not very far behind. Black-haired, rugged Summaro was introduced in *Red Sonja* #7 (January 1978), which began an interesting two-parter. The Hyrkanian vixen stumbles onto Skranos, a walled city whose townspeople have heard minstrels' stories of how Sonja had slain King Ghanif of Pah-Dishah – so the villagers capture her and prepare to lynch her! Thorne's full-page drawing concluding Part One is gorgeous! Then, in #8 (March), Summaro (Sonja's only ally in Skranos), rescues her, just as the hangman readies to open the gallows' trap door under her! After that peril, Sonja must do imaginative battle with a musclebound rogue named Jimodo inside the very carcass of a long-dead mastodon! Safeguard, anyone?

Red Sonja #9 (May 1978) featured another milestone story, in this writer's opinion. The tale revealed that Summaro's mother is *not* a mortal, as is his father, General Quillos. Summaro's mother, Apah Alah, is a *wizardess* – and Summaro has inherited a portion of her powers! Summaro makes a pass at Sonja and she threateningly draws her sword. Apah Alah appears to defend her son and transports Sonja to her own netherworld and makes her race in a chariot around a fiery pit with a green man-monster named Amparo (no, not David Bruce Banner!). Ultimately, Summaro employs his own powers to rescue Red Sonja; instead of being grateful to her new suitor-of-sorts, she remains her haughty – yes, bitchy – self.

Currently, Sonja and Summaro are in the middle of an exciting multi-parter called "Red Lace," which finds Sonja at a handicap for the first time in her life! In *Red Sonja* #10 (July 1978) – whose Thorne cover is a masterpiece! – Summaro and Sonja venture into Apah Alah's arcane castle where Summaro was conceived. Now the crumbling citadel is haunted by bat-things, an old man named Marmo, and a centaur! The deranged Marmo attacks and blinds the centaur; before its death, the bejeweled half-man/half-horse flails about for its assailant and seizes Red Sonja and blinds her with its own blood! However, in #11 (September), Sonja regains her sight by the splashing of a dying bird's blood on her eyes – blood is a recurring symbol in "Red Lace."

Couldn't Roy Thomas and Clair Noto have waited another issue or even two or three to restore Sonja's sight? It would have been interesting to see Sonja try to cope with her blindness over a longer period of time – plus, it would have turned her comic book temporarily into a kind of prehistoric *Daredevil.*

Red Sonja may have regained her sight, but her and Summaro's troubles are far from over. Sonja, who deserves the title, "Super-Heroine Number One," more than DC's Wonder Woman (in terms of sales figures), has proven that she will be wandering, cursing, killing, and mixing it up with all kinds of Hyborian weirdos in the prehistoric Marvel Comics universe for many years to come! As a matter of fact, Red Sonja will canvass Robert E. Howard's legendary terrain until her iron bikini *does* "rust shut!!"

Jeff Thompson * 6807 Pennywell Drive * Nashville, TN 37205

THE HEROINE REVUE

Janet Van Dyne-Pym... The Wasp

by scott gibson

The contents of the June 1963 issue of *Tales to Astonish* (#44) are special for two reasons: The 18-page lead feature titled "The Creature From Kosmos" re-told the series of events which led scientist Henry Pym to become the super-hero called Ant-Man. That same tale introduced The Wasp, one of Marvel Comics' very first super-heroines.

The story, scripted by Stan Lee and H.E. Huntley, and illustrated by Jack Kirby, went something like this: Ant-Man, returning from a mission escorted by a horde of soldier ants, is brooding about the death of his wife Maria some time ago and how her demise had spurred him on to develop a reducing gas, clothing made of unstable molecules and a cybernetic helmet that enabled him to communicate with ants, all of which he used to become a crimefighter. But Henry Pym decides that these innovations are not enough – that, in the event of his defeat and death, he ought to have a partner to carry on in his stead. He is undecided as to who this partner might be, but he begins developing equipment for a sidekick, just the same.

In the midst of these preparations, Pym is interrupted by a Dr. Vernon Van Dyne who has come to request aid in his project to find life on other planets and make contact. Henry is brusk in his refusal to the older man, eager to get back to his own plans. But he takes considerable notice of the doctor's daughter Janet, whom he feels looks a lot like his deceased wife. In turn, Janet finds Pym "quite handsome, but scientists are such bores." She dismisses him as a "dull, intellectual bookworm."

Back at their own home, Dr. Van Dyne continues searching for life in outer space while Janet goes out searching for excitement. But it is her father who encounters all of the excitement, as, somehow, his exploratory rays attract a blob-like creature who is drawn into the observatory. The fluidic being introduces itself as a criminal escapee from the planet Kosmos. He decides he will make slaves of everyone on Earth, but first he compels Van Dyne to look into his eyes. This causes the doctor to die of "something akin to fear." Accomplishing this, the creature smashes the ray device and leaves.

Janet returns later to find her father's body. She telephones Henry Pym who dismisses her frightened words as a society girl prank. But he then receives a similar message from his ants and realizes that Janet was telling the truth. Changing to Ant-Man, he goes to the Van Dyne residence where he determines that an alien force is at work. Pym also observes a change in the doctor's daughter as she vows to avenge her father. "The bored flighty shell she wore is gone! She has determination, strength of character!" Ant-Man says to himself. He decides that

perhaps he has finally found the partner he sought, so he instructs Janet to go to Henry Pym's lab.

She complies, and he meets her there as Pym. But quickly he reveals his secret identity to her and offers to bestow the powers of a wasp upon her, so that she may join him in crime-fighting. Janet is quick to assent, so Henry begins the necessary processes. He implants synthetic cells beneath her skin tissue which will cause her to grow wings and antennae when she utilizes the reducing gas. When the operation is complete, Pym gives Janet a costume made of unstable molecules like his own. She has no sooner donned it than they are summoned into action against the creature from Kosmos.

Janet, christened The Wasp, makes a foolhardy effort to defeat The Kosmonian on her own and is nearly destroyed by the gaze which killed her father. Ant-Man saves her at the last second and reprimands her sharply. He has discovered a means of defeating the menace from his friendly ants. In an eleventh-hour effort, Ant-Man, Wasp and thousands of ants destroy the creature with a chemical compound placed in rifle shells and fired at The Kosmonian. The story ends with Janet secretly deciding she is in love with Hank, but vowing to keep it a secret until he feels the same way.

The most curious aspect of this story is its dialogue, which reads like the script of a 1930's movie. The conversations are almost devoid of contractions, making even the most casual remarks overly dramatic. Things like: "Come, now you will try your wings!", "I must be careful lest I *do* fall in love with her." and "And from now on you must not display such emotion."

Highly coincidental is the fact that Pym has a costume ready for Janet – The Wasp – just moments after his decision that she should be his partner. Had he planned from the onset that his sidekick would be female? Odd, too, is that Ms. Van Dyne, upon finding her father murdered, does not call either the police or an ambulance, but rather Henry Pym, a man she has met just once, and one who was not particularly nice to her father. Yet, even in this initial tale, the personality traits which have always made The Wasp such an enjoyable and lively character are present: Her impetuousness, stubborness, gaiety and mischievious determination. These do not brand her a scatterbrained female, but rather a three-dimensional delight who offsets the perennially more bland, easy-going Hank Pym.

In the following issue, #45, the insect king and queen were faced with one of Ant-Man's old foes, in "The Terrible Traps of Egghead!" The evil Egghead, brooding over his last defeat at Ant-Man's hands, was determined to strike back at his opponent by capturing The Wasp. "Every man has his Achilles heel!" mused the evil scientist. "We will strike at Ant-Man through his . . . The Wasp!" He was able to capture Janet with relative ease by appealing to her vanity. As her alter-ego, Jan decided to go out 'solo' on a case, to make Henry "think of (her) as a full-fledged woman . . . a woman in love!" With logic as elusive and motives as shallow as these, it was no wonder Egghead was able to capture her.

But Ant-Man freed his novice partner, and Wasp quickly turned the tables on her antagonist, defeating Egghead and capturing his henchmen almost single-handedly, proving that the villain had underestimated her prowess considerably. With this issue, Don Heck assumed the pencilling duties.

In subsequent issues, Ant-Man and Wasp met and defeated a robot Cyclops and his alien masters (*Tales to Astonish* #46), a mad musician/hypnotist named Trago (#47), and, in TTA #48, The Porcupine, against whom The Wasp distinguished herself by coming to the rescue of Ant-Man, who reduced to tiny size, had been left adrift in a bathtub full of water with no means of enlarging himself or escaping.

The adventure in #49 saw Ant-Man transformed into Giant-Man when Henry Pym found a way to modify his powers so that he could not only shrink, but grow to a height of twelve feet. For whatever reason, he did not share this new ability with The Wasp, although he did give her capsules which enabled her to shrink, evidently an improvement over the old shrinking gas method. This tale was written and drawn by the Lee and Kirby team, who would handle the next couple of issues.

Giant-Man and his beautiful ally did battle with The Human Top in TTA #50&51. Issue #51 is notable also because it introduced a 5-page anthology feature called "The Wonderful Wasp Tells A Tale" which consisted of little more than the heroine serving as narrator (a la Cain, Abel, Mr. Bones, etc.) of a mystery or science fiction tale. Unlike those other narrators, however, Wasp did not tell these stories to the reader, but to children in orphanages, patients in Veterans' hospitals and other deserving (?) people.

Giant-Man was faced with the onslaught of the wicked Black Knight in #52. Wasp was on hand to save her hero/boyfriend again, but then disgraced herself by being a show-off and requiring Hank to allow Black Knight to escape while he rescued foolish Janet.

The next issue portrayed The Wasp in no better light. She served as little more than an unwitting pawn of The Porcupine, returned to have revenge on his foes. Jan led him directly to Pym's laboratory where a battle royale ensued. The Wasp was put out of action in seconds, leaving Giant-Man to best his antagonist single-handedly (and with a fractured ankle, to boot!). Don Heck illustrated this tale as a fill-in. The previous issue and subsequent ones were handled by Dick Ayers.

Tales to Astonish #54 (April 1964) saw the pair defeat El Toro, dictator of a South American country. In #55, The Human Top forced Hank and Jan into a rematch, to which they proved more than equal. "The Coming of The Magician" in TTA #56 revealed that Hank had purchased an engagement ring for Jan, although he did not present it to her in this issue. The duo *did*, however, finally and openly declare their love for one another.

Spider-Man guest-starred in the following issue. It was a mawkish piece of fluff which involved Egghead who tricked the heroes into battling each other. In a particularly nauseating "cute" move, author Stan Lee revealed that Jan and Spidey couldn't abide being close to each other because wasps and spiders are natural enemies. The closing pages of the tale were filled with these two trading insults and name-calling. This story introduced a new weapon for Jan – her wasp's sting, a compressed air gun, which fired blasts of air strong enough to knock a person down.

Beginning in this same issue, Wasp's storytelling feature was replaced by a new series starring – THE WASP, in solo adventures! Plotted by Lee and scripted and drawn by Larry Leiber, this first story, "A Voice In The Dark!" was a colossal disappointment. On her way to meet Henry for a date, Janet saw a burglar leaving a jewelry store with his loot. Although she tried a number of tricks to capture the chap, none of them worked. Finally she resorted to hollering at him through a piece of paper rolled up like a megaphone, telling him that she was Sue Storm, The Invisible Girl, and that the rest of The Fantastic Four were on their way, so he'd better give up. The bumbling schnook believed her and did give up. End of 7-page solo debut for The Wasp.

The Tiny Titaness' next solo venture was a 100% improvement. It saw The Wasp doing battle with The Magician once more, in the middle of a department store. The adventure was full of cleverly-conceived "minature tricks" such as Jan riding around in a toy sports car.

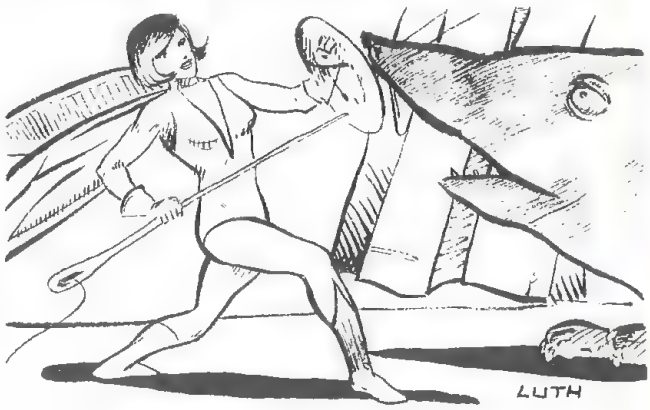
In the same issue (#58), Giant-Man's lead feature, "The Coming of Colossus" pitted G-M and The Wasp against an alien of enormous stature. With finely-meshed teamwork, the duo sent their foe fleeing back to his own planet.

Sadly, Wasp's solo series disappeared with the very next issue, which guest-starred The Hulk and paved the way for The Green Goliath's own strip which began in TTA #60. Also in #59 was a special back-up feature called "Let's Learn about Hank and Jan," which, despite its title, provided lots of information about Giant-Man and almost nothing about The Wasp.

Issue #60's tale amounted to a Giant-Man solo adventure with Janet Van Dyne on hand for just a few panels. She played a more important role in "Now Walks The Android" in TTA #61, where she helped her partner defeat a monstrous creation of Egghead's. Number 62's "Giant-Man Versus The Wonderful Wasp" saw the tiny heroine battling a bogus Giant-Man who had discovered Henry Pym's secret identity and had stolen his costume. She was able to defeat her foe effortlessly, even though he had all of Giant-Man's powers at his command. Another artistic change was enacted with this issue as Carl Burgos took charge of the pencils.

The old protection racket scam was being reenacted by a small-time thug called The Wrecker in the following issue which saw not only The Wasp in action, but a few panels of plain ol' Janet Van Dyne using judo on some thugs. This made a refreshing change from Wasp's standard bag of tiny tricks.

Sub-Mariner's foe Attuma abducted Jan in TTA #64. In a rescue effort not unlike those of previous adventures, Giant-Man arrived to save the day. In #65, Hank Pym's alter-ego underwent yet another change in the tale titled "Presenting The New Giant-Man!" Wasp designed a new set of fighting togs for her boyfriend and Henry developed a new helmet which enabled him to change the size of anyone – or any creature around him. Artist Bob Powell pencilled this issue, as he would handle this series for the remainder of its stay in *Tales to Astonish*. Issue 66 presented Giant-Man and Wasp's first female foe, a woman named Madame Macabre, who had the ability to shrink or enlarge inanimate objects. She, like only too many before her, determined to strike at Giant-Man through his "weakest link – " The Wasp. A major part of the story saw Ms. Macabre engaging in furious battle with our heroine, who again proved she was no pushover. Not only did Jan rescue Hank from certain death, she destroyed the villainess' size-changing apparatus.



Wasp tamed a bee which she used as a minature steed in #67, but her involvement in the story's main plot was minimal.

A two-parter in issues 68 & 69 concluded Wasp's and Giant-Man's stay in *Tales to Astonish*. The Human Top returned again in a tale which also showed Hank Pym developing a cybernetic helmet for Jan which allowed her to communicate with wasps and instruct them to do her bidding. She also abandoned her bee-steed for a wasp. The first half of this tale was written by Stan Lee and the second half by Al Hartley which probably accounts for the huge blunder that was made. In his portion, Lee established the fact that Giant-Man had lost the ability to switch to insect size, while in the tale's concluding pages, Hartley had the hero escape a death-trap by shrinking to tiny proportions once more! At any rate, Hank Pym vowed at the story's conclusion never to place Jan in danger again, even if it meant giving up his super-hero career. Which is what he (and The Wasp, too!) did, at least temporarily. Their series was replaced in the following issue by The Sub-Mariner.

Wasp and Giant-Man were two of the founding members of The Avengers, and appeared in that title from #1 (September 1963) through #16 (May 1965), in which issue they announced that they were taking a leave of absence. Their departure from this magazine came within two months of their exit from *Tales to Astonish*.

Wasp returned to The Avengers' fold alone in #26. She was mysteriously absent from #27, and in #28, Giant-Man (now calling himself Goliath) returned, only to find his partner needed rescuing once more, this time from The Collector! The duo remained with the team until #75, missing only a handful of issues for their honeymoon, following their wedding in *Avengers* #60. Before that fateful day, however, Goliath reverted first to Ant-Man and then to

Yellowjacket. To this day he has continued the practice of changing super-hero identities every few years.

In *Avengers* #83, Wasp returned to the fold only to be duped, along with Scarlet Witch, Medusa and Black Widow, by The Enchantress, disgusing herself as The Valkyrie, into revolt against the male Avengers. After this single issuw appearance, The Wasp again flitted into temporary limbo. Since that time, she and Hank have returned to this super-group on several occasions. Currently they are regular members once more.

Henry Pym, this time in his Ant-Man incarnation, received his own series once more beginning in *Marvel Feature* #4 (July 1972). The opening episode featured Janet Van Dyne/Wasp not at all, but served as a prologue to an epic adventure which would continue throughout Ant-Man's entire brief stay in this title. Due to a laboratory accident, Henry Pym shrunk to ant-size and found himself unable to return to his normal height. During his plight, he ran afoul of several old foes, including Egghead in MF #5 and the Human Top, now calling himself The Whirlwind, in #6. The Wasp appeared in only the last panel of #5, but was on hand throughout #6, falling victim to the same problem vexing Ant-Man – she became trapped in Wasp-size. In #7, Jan's transformation continued, as she sprouted wasp-like appendages and went berserk. This cliff-hanger was interrupted in #8 by a reprinting of The Wasp's origin from *Tales to Astonish* #44. The tale resumed in #9, with Ant-Man nearly being destroyed by his wife before discovering that it was possible to control her with his cybernetic ant-helmet. But in the midst of this trauma, both hero and heroine were captured by a new foe – Dr. Nemesis who inadvertently cured Ant-Man, restoring him to human size. Nemesis was planning to use Hank Pym to steal classified secrets from The Avengers, but Pym refused, and attacked the villain with such gusto that he was caught unprepared and easily defeated. Afterwards, Ant-Man used Dr. Nemesis's equipment to restore The Wasp to full size. The pair then slipped into anonymity once more, until summoned by the Avengers a couple of years later.

While Wasp and Hank have made occasional guest-appearances in other magazines, only one of these guest-spots is of real significance. This occurred just last year, in *Marvel Team-Up* #'s 59 and 60. In the midst of a battle with Equinox, a villain with the combined powers of The Human Torch and Iceman, Yellowjacket gave Wasp a serum which modified and improved her powers substantially. Simplified, this meant that when Jan reduces in size, she becomes increasingly more powerful. Which brings the careers of Janet Van Dyne-Pym and hubby pretty much up to date.

Until this latest modification, Wasp was primarily a "weak-sister" type of super-hero, molded in Stan Lee's image of what a heroine ought to be: Pretty, possessing a non-physical super-power and serving primarily as a handy damsel-in-distress to be rescued with alarming regularity by a more powerful *male* super-hero. Only The Wasp's irascible happy-go-lucky personality made her stand out in a room crowded full of Avengers. We can only hope that, with her increased powers, The Wasp can finally begin showing up some of her teammates. But only future issues of the *Avengers* will tell. Oh yes, trivia freaks take note: Jan was never, *ever* referred to as 'The *Winsome* Wasp' in *Tales to Astonish.* That sappy nickname saw the light of day in the pages of *Avengers.* With a bit of luck, this column will be the last place you ever see it again.

- Scott Gibson

Seduction of the Innocent #1
($1.00 from Seduction of the Innocent SF & Comic Book Store, 146 Witherspoon, Princeton, N.J. 08540)

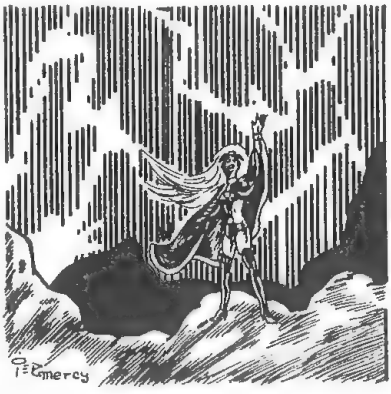
Seduction of the Innocent, as anyone who reads the ads in the major fanzines knows, is a bookstore in New Jersey named after Frederick Wertham's infamous book about comics. It is also the title of a new magazine/catalog published by the proprietors of said store. This "catazine" is in fact a high quality fanzine featuring only a few pages of house ads for the shop, thus rendering its one dollar pricetag very reasonable. *Seduction* #1 is devoted to the topic of Women in Comics, presented in an unabashedly equalitarian and feminist manner. Lest any "Good Girl Art" fans reading this be turned off at this point, I should like to let them in on the not very well kept secret that Joe Staton draws some very sexy women (quick! – before the feminists in the audience revoke my right to live, let me give equal offense to everyone by stating that I, Cat Yronwode, being of sound mind and healthy body, see no inherent contradiction between sexiness and feminism) and this publication is graced with nine full-page pinups and a cover from the thigh-struck Mr. Staton. There's even a beautiful portrait of Agatha Harkness for all of *her* fans to drool over.

Marilyn Bethke and Alex Koehn's editorials contain clear statements of their intent to judge heroic women on their own merits – neither as role-reversed carbon copies of male heroes nor as adolescent sex-objects. Their attitude is praiseworthy, but I find it dismal that, after all these years, such statements of intent still need to be made, that it is still radical to judge men and women by their actions first, their reasons second and by their genders not at all.

Bethke's article on *Wonder Woman* caused me another kind of distress. Although she is obviously quite knowledgeable on the subject of Wonder Woman's history, it seems that in her haste to cover the comic with the blanket condemnation of "bloodcurdling femininity" she completely misses the point of Charles Moulton's use of mytho-poetic goddess symbolism in the early comics and is either ignorant of or oblivious to his avowed intent to give women and girls something to feel proud of in themselves. True, Moulton's males were generally dolts or villains, but he was purposely serving up clownish caricatures of male stereotypes as a dramatic alternative to the then-current male-supremicist fare being offered in the likes of *Superman.*

By failing to note that Moulton was writing his stories 45 years ago to entertain a nation at war, Bethke is also able to make light of Moulton's deliciously erudite sense of humor. If he were alive and writing today, I am convinced that the man would be ranked with Roy Thomas and Steve Englehart for his knowledge of classical mythic themes, and with Steve Gerber for his stinging yet heartfelt concern with humanity's foibles. As far as the Bob Kanigher *Wonder Woman* of the 1950's goes, I think that, if anything, Bethke is altogether too burning is too good for them. Heresy may be cheap-shot journalism but since DC's outrageous killing off of Steve Trevor in WW #248, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the true Wonder Woman died with Charles Moulton and everything printed since then has been a meaningless charade. Can you imagine Bob Kanigher writing Will Eisner's Spirit? The thought is appalling – and Wonder Woman, the true Amazon Princess, was just as much Moulton's personal property as Denny Colt is Eisner's. Bethke's depressing account of the latterday Wonder Woman is must reading for anyone foolish enough to believe that this "heroine" comic is anything other than a gender-reversed example of the worst and most twisted "battle of the sexes" mentality. Like Bethke, I long for someone with taste to write the adventures of the Amazon Warrior, but unlike her, I fear it will never happen.

There are two interviews in *Seduction* #1 – and while the one with DC's Jeanette Kahn is interesting and informative, the other, with Marvel's Chris Claremont, is both exciting and insightful. THS's own Margaret O'Connell conducted the Claremont interview and managed to



ask almost every question I would have, had I been face-to-face at last with Cheerful Chris. Claremont is not the flashiest author in comics today, but it can truthfully be said that he is the most understanding of women-as-people-as-heroines. I have never been disappointed with a Claremont heroine, from Misty Knight and Colleen Wing on down to Storm and Ms. Marvel, so it was very pleasing to find out indirectly, through his answers to Margaret's questions, that his characterizations of women stem from a truly equalitarian and liberated *heart*, not from the sort of liberal-pretentious poses adopted by the likes of Gerry Conway. The fact that accusations of lesbianism have been leveled at Claremont's Misty and Colleen has always alarmed me. I thought we fans had learned a thing or two about the follies of sexual name-calling from Frederick Wertham's original "Seduction of the Innocent," but that seems to be an unwarranted assumption. Thankfully, Claremont refused to either confirm or deny the charges. Comrade-in-arms love is one of the nobler of human emotions and love in *any* form is already rare enough in this world without forbidding certain expressions of it.

The most unsatisfactory article in *Seduction* is what amounts to documentary evidence of some wretched fannish feud which began in New Jersey and metastasized into the pages of *The Buyer's Guide* and other vulnerable organs. With each irately puerile letter I read, my small store of patience dwindled, until by the end of the lot I was ready to run my sword down New Jersey fandom's collective gullet. Lest I be accused of taking sides, I shall refrain from the temptation to voice my opinions on the subjects of Red Sonja, her costume, Frank Thorne, the Sonja "girls," exploitation, Wendy Pini, barbarian morals, Marvel Comics, Marilyn Bethke, feminism, Yellow Journalism, and "talent." I *will* go on record as saying that I find rape abhorrent in the highest degree.

Margaret O'Connell's "How To Write Superheroines the Marvel Way" is just as thought-provoking as "The Sonja Letters" are boring. Her useful distinction between DC's policy of "spin-off" heroines and Marvel's team-heroine, and (until recently) villainess-into-heroine formulas went far beyond the usual fannish "aren't comics neat?" triviality and into some of the basic questions to which true literary criticism must address itself. That she finds both major publishing houses deficient in taste, originality and credibility when it comes to heroic women was not unexpected, of course, but her objective way of identifying the problem is a monument of heavenly logic. I wish Stan Lee would read it.

All in all, *Seduction of the Innocent* (discounting the painfully tedious Red Sonja feud) is exactly what a high class fanzine about heroines-as-people should be. There is no fatuous smirking about "attractive, tight-fitting costumes," as has too often appeared in THA, and controversial subjects are fearlessly broached in a calm manner. Even though I don't agree with all of the opinions expressed in *Seduction* (and why should I?), it is one of the most entertaining, intelligent and well-produced zines I have read in a long time. And for those of you who can't read, there's always that full-page portrait of Agatha Harkness to drool over. - *Cat Yronwode*

"Portrait" by Lynda Carter
Epic Records, CBS, Inc., 1978

Sometimes one wonders at the quality of a record album advertised and hyped in all the consumer magazines (*TV Guide, People, US*). You'd think it was just a ploy to push a mediocre disc by a big celebrity trying to make an extra buck. I was amazed that I actually listened to more than one track the first time I played Lynda Carter's debut album, entitled "Portrait."

Carter, better know as TV's Wonder Woman, has been a pop/rock singer for years before her TV series. I got a chance to catch her singing debut on the Mike Douglas Show on TV some

months back, and was impressed because most TV stars who try to sing usually burn my eardrums.

"Portrait is good for what it strives to be — MOR pop music. This means that so far as musical appeal goes, Carter stands somewhere between Linda Ronstadt and Anita Bryant (closer to Ronstadt, I'd say).

Basically I rate the album as good background music for a quiet social gathering. There are few really upbeat tunes to give the disc variety; mostly it's a collection of shimmering love songs. Even an old rock hit, "Just One Look," is toned down for the middle of the road audience, and "Want to Get Beside You" is the only song that even makes me think of getting up and dancing. But the whole album is very pleasing to the ear.

For the oglers who still see Carter as a "Wonder Woman," there's a sexy photo of her on the back of the jacket – it's also available commercially as a poster, from the same people who brought us the now-legendary Farrah poster. There's a lesson in marketing somewhere here.

- Nick Chinn

Scarlett Pilgrim by Trina Robbins
($1.00 plus 25¢ postage from Last Gasp, P.O. Box 212, Berkeley, CA 94701)

I'm not that much into undergrounds. I collect a lot of them, but just as with my overground comics, I rarely read them; I just give the art a once-over and file away the book.

But I've always enjoyed Trina Robbins' artwork and style. It is a happy medium polished overground art and on the other side of the spectrum, those trashy, poorly-drawn comix I can't stand to look at. The "Last Gasp" comix publishers put out some of the better undergrounds, and Trina's *Scarlett Pilgrim* is no exception.

The story follow Scarlett, a San Francisco "working girl," and an older, retired hooker named Dollface, who both get involved as pawns in some C.I.A. derring-do in a Middle-East-type foreign country, getting tangled in a political revolution. For entertainment, Scarlett finds herself in the bedsheets of every important governmental or guerrilla leader in the fictional country Bahraq.

The story line is both light-hearted while overdramatic, fast-moving, and poking fun at international politics and the C.I.A. It's a lot of fun reading.

The book climaxes with Scarlett and Dollface double-crossing the C.I.A., and ends with a letter telling Scarlett that her cousin is coming to stay with her for awhile . . . unfortunately the family doesn't know anything about Scarlett's occupation, a situation setting up the next Scarlett Pilgrim book. I can't wait. *- Nick Chinn*

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THE LELA DOWLING FAN CLUB

Margaret O'Connell - "Lela Dowling's art is unbelievably good, and her script for the Cheshire Cat story wasn't bad, either. I read it four times. I think I've fallen in love with Major Alice."

Martin Lock - "Lela Dowling is an excellent addition to the crew . . . "

Mercy Van Vlack - "The Centauress cover is very striking and the Cheshire Cat story was pleasing to behold! My compliments to Lela Dowling and all her issue! Excellent draftsperson."

Cat Yronwode - "Lela Dowling is GREAT . . . and tell her I said so."

Deby Dunn - "I enjoyed 'The Cheshire Cat' very much, but it was way too short. I sure hope that isn't all there is to it, and I'm looking forward to seeing more . . . The cover art was excellent."

Charles Henry - "Will have to agree with everyone else . . . re: Lela Dowling – she's superb! (Probably won't stay in the "amateur" ranks for very long!)"

Ellen Campbell - "I enjoyed the Cheshire Cat feature. Is there any chance it could be continued instead of just a one-shot?"

Rich Morrissey - "Lela's nondescript Wonderland . . . (strip) was superb . . . "

Mike Roth - "That Lela Dowling cover (to THS #13) is a knockout!"

Richard Bruning - "Speaking of Women Fen . . . LELA DOWLING!!! She's amazing, fantastic, f***in' ORIGINAL already!!!! I'm *very* impressed with her work! You can tell her I said so.

Dear Steven,

I met some Heroine's Showcase people at the New York comic con, was given #13 & 12 of your mag (I've seen it around for quite awhile, actually, and preferred the original name, *The Heroine Addict* – somehow that was a catchy pun) and, anyway, am finally writing, and including a copy of my recent book, *Scarlett Pilgrim,* for review. Do you review "underground" (I hate that name) comix? Or are you solely interested in Marvel and DC? I enjoyed the Red Sonja issue as she is one of the only commercial comic heroines with any life to her. I find most contemporary comic heroines to be (if one may use the term) emasculated.

The article on jungle heroines, one of my favorite subjects, left me feeling very unsatisfied. Where were Tiger Girl (beautiful creation of the short-lived Matt Baker), and Rulah, queen of Fox comics?

I love Frank Thorne's enthusiasm! It's refreshing to find an artist who feels about his work the way I do about mine. Which brings us back to Scarlett Pilgrim. I hope you like her and will review her.

Trina Robbins
1982 - 15th St.
San Francisco, CA 94114

Scarlett Pilgrim *is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. And I'm sure that the oversights in the jungle heroines article was a matter of resources. Our writers don't always have access to all the books that they would like to when preparing an article.*

We look forward to your article on Tiger Girl in our next issue! - SRJ

Dear Steve,

Not sure if I responded to THS or not after sending for #12, but in any case, it was a very enjoyable fmz.

Thought you might be interested in some of the details on a book I'm working on with artist Howard Bender. It's a Spiderman - Hellcat team-up, and will re-introduce to the Marvel Universe the former Miss Hedy Wolfe (of *Patsy & Hedy* fame), as the wife of a cop who's a member of a sub rosa, intr-police death-squad. This heavily armed group is knocking off those enemies of society who escape retribution through legal loopholes. And one of the few media figures they trust happens to be J.J.J. Ergo, Spiderman (who will, by then, have been cleared of any charges) soon becomes a victim of these Magnum Force-type

vigilantes. If Hedy has a future beyond this issue, I don't know. But I'm interested to see how it turns out.

Bill Kunkel
85-30 - 121st St.
Kew Gardens, NY 11415

Dear Steven,

TA #6 was a good job in most respects, but the Skull Goddess story was an incredible disappointment. Why did Mark Owens have to be killed? Yes, I know I'm a notorious bleeding heart, but since the whole thing seemed to be intended as a final wrap-up there's no reason that had to be thrown in - especially the way it was done. If Mark had to die, why couldn't he have been fatally wounded when the bullet first hit him? The whole thing seemed incredibly contrived, and if the character is brought back it'll be an even worse move. I've heard Mitch's vow to make the Goddess pay for Mark's murder dozens of times in fifth-rate strips, and I've had enough!

Nick did a very nice job with Ixiona, although I hope it won't degenerate into a "pure" reworking of mythology as so many strips with that basis have done. Since Ixiona is in the 20th century, a few more present-day elements besides Diana wondering "Is this really happening?" would add a little more uniqueness. Her suggestion of police protection is a nice touch, and I suppose a rather heavy dose of mythology is inevitable to begin with but I'd like to see Ixiona visit present-day Athens before very long. Just think of what might be done with her . . .

Aside from these two text stories, there wasn't anything in the issue but strips – a little too great a preponderance, in my mind. In general, the quality of those strips was the best yet, but the Rainbow Girl strip (no pun intended, even in the light of that last panel) left a bit to be desired. Darrell McNeil is doing a little too much swiping to suit me; he's certainly no worse than Mike Nasser and a number of other unabashed swipers who've invaded the professional ranks, but that doesn't really excuse it. And Chris Padovano didn't seem to find much to satirize this time; his "Eye Shadow" could easily have been just the regular hero in drag. Nevertheless, it never fails to astound me how brilliantly he handles his sexually reversed characters.

Rich Morrissey
55 Claudette Circle
Framingham, MA 01701

Dear Steven,

I was charmed by Lela's drawing of Sonja, which looks like Wendy Snow - one of the 6 Sonja girls, and an up-and-coming fantasy artist on her own.

Is that name Espinoza on the centerfold? Well, that's a goodie too.

Lela's work leaves me wondering if she is a pro . . . she's got a poetic touch. It was lovely. Encourage her — nice stuff.

Frank Thorne
1967 Grenville Rd.
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

Dear Steve,

I received my first issue of *The Heroines Showcase* the other day and I must say you have a GREAT magazine! I can't say I loved it though, because the whole issue was about Red Sonja (one of my least favorite heroines). But the professional look of the magazine, with the pictures and typesetting, took my mind off that. I'm really glad I subscribed!!

Does my subscription just send me THS or do I have to pay extra to receive *The Adventuress*? The reason I asked was that I thought I was suppose to receive TA #6, but I guess I'm going to receive the next issue, right? Thank you for your time and trouble and please answer my letter!

Chris Abell
Star Route 42174
Morgantown, KY 42261

Unless a special request is made, all of our subscribers receive both THS and TA, along with any special publications we put out. And subs start with the current CHFC zine (which does not necessarily correspond with our advertising) unless otherwise requested. - SRJ

Dear Steve,

You never cease to surprise me by printing my letters. You folks must not get too many letters if you've got to print mine. All modesty aside, however, my reaction to Margaret O'Connell's "Great Red Sonja Interview" is about the same. I think its a great idea, and she did a fine job. I mean if you're going to talk to someone about Red Sonja, you've got to talk to Frank Thorne, right? He's the definitive Red Sonja person, as far as I'm concerned.

Jeff Thompson's "Red-Hot Sonja" didn't go over so well with me, though. I couldn't

really tell his viewpoint. His opening was enthusiastic, but he cooled down to lukewarm pretty fast. The ending was a little abrupt, too, like zooming down the freeway at 55 mph (see how law-abiding I am?) and suddenly seeing a stop light turning red 10 feet in front of you.

On the whole, I was satisfied with the quality of THS #13. Ms. O'Connell's articles were very interesting.

Comments on TA #7 – Both covers are fine. Lela's art is great, however I think that black ink shows up better on blue paper rather than yellow. The color this time sort of hurt my eyes.

Noel Knight was good, though there wasn't much to it (her?). Bob Rodi's art seemed a bit thick and black at times. But it was so short that I didn't really know what was happening before it was over. The Suicide Squad was different, but just as good. I owe Mercy a letter. Her ideas are original and the charcters exciting, and they were rather well presented. Too bad it ended so soon.

Annaliese Gevaert was okay. The plot was fine. How sad that we never really got told who Annaliese (or anyone else, for that matter – except Miranda) is and how she got that way. Ixiona wasn't so good. In TA #6 Ixiona was a sober type trying to improve her father's name; now she's suddenly an airhead. I realize Ixiona isn't supposed to be high drama, but there was too much arbitrary silliness floating around. Tsk and double-tsk.

All in all, I'd say that I liked it very well. It was a nice thing to come home to, anyway. The index was really interesting. I've missed a lot of stuff, and now I'm eager to catch up.

Deby Dunn
15943 Maracaibo
Hacienda Hgts., CA 91745

Dear Steve,

Thank you for the two publications that arrived last week. The index was a very nice surprise.

After 22 years of reading comics and their lettercols my vocabulary should be filled with superlatives, or at least enough adjectives to fill a page. It isn't. All the little cells can come up with is a comment on Mercy's Suicide Squad in TA #7. It is probably (1) the most mature topic to hit TA, and (2) it's probably the best thing Mercy has ever done.

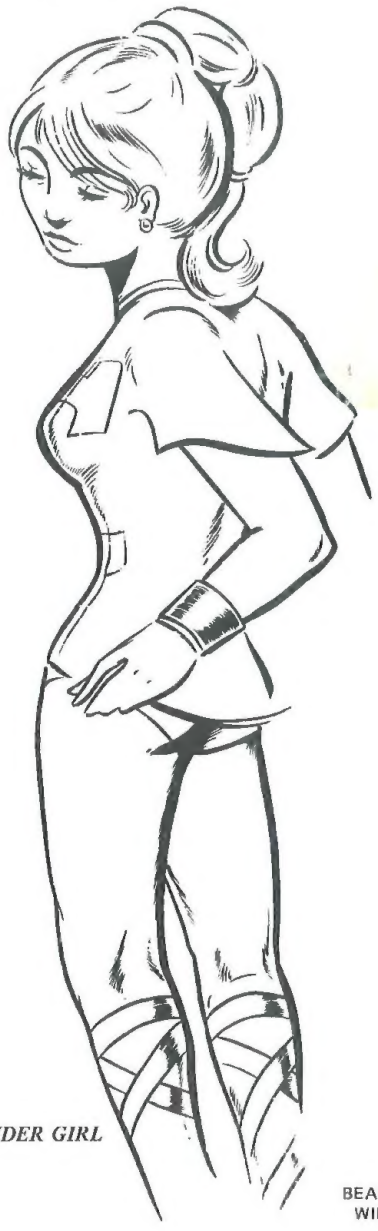
Having already dropped a line to King of Prussia country, it also wouldn't hurt to button hole you for a moment – more of Mercy's Squad would be fine.

Rich Morrissey's and Stan Holder's "The Immortal" was also interesting.

Just had a thought more appropriate to THS – is anyone going to review Strick's *Hola!*? The first two issues look pretty good.

Stephen Borer
2135 Iglehart Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55104

If Mercy wants to do another Suicide Squad strip, I'll publish. And Hola! *will be reviewed in our next issue. - SRJ*



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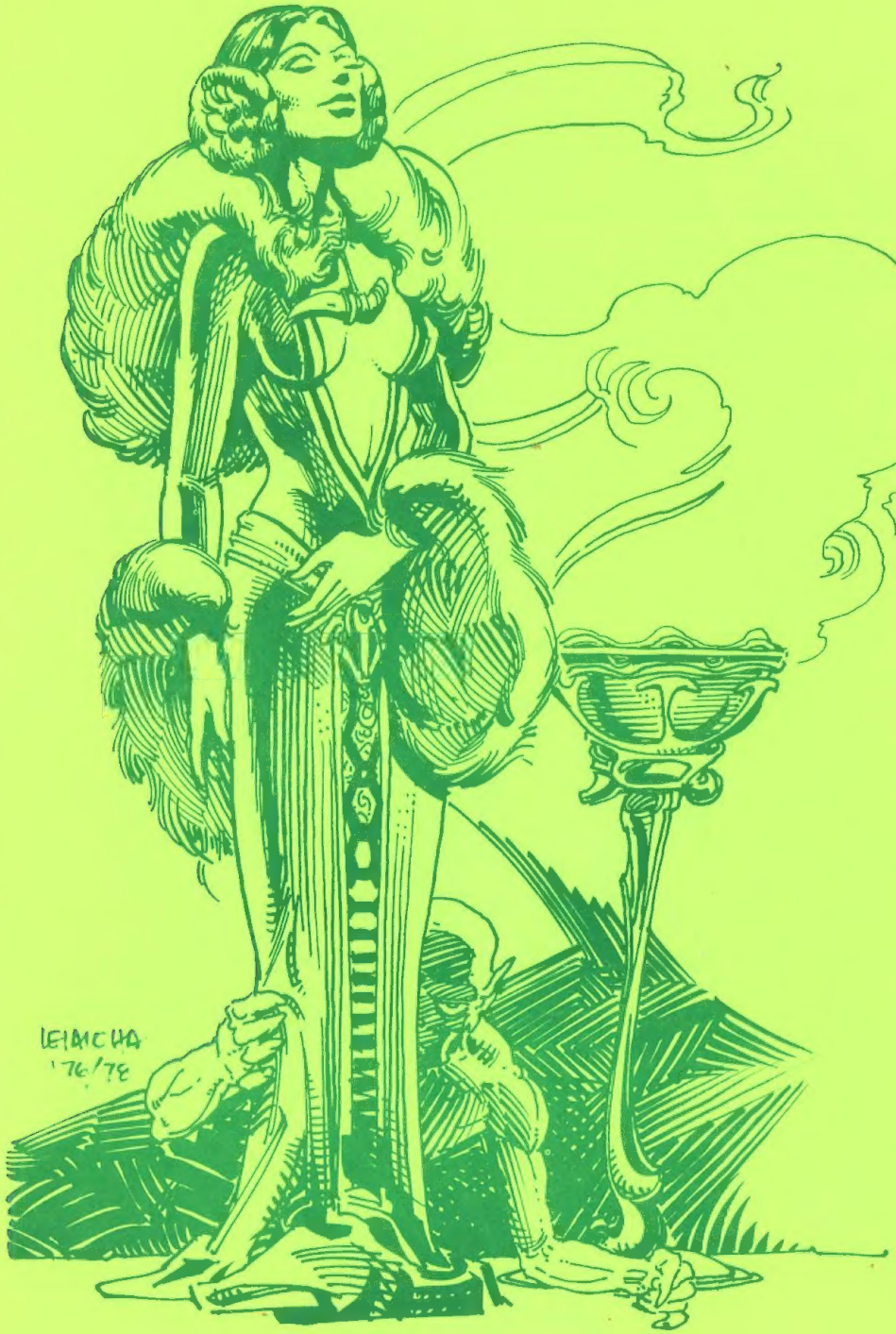
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